

CASE STUDY

SHAPING THE DIGITAL FUTURE OF HOSPITALITY IN GREECE

GRECOTEL HOTELS & RESORTS

Grecotel is one of the leading hotel operators in Greece. It has 32 hotels and resorts in some of the country's most beautiful locations. The business holds a 4% share of turnover across all 4- and 5-star bookings in Greece.

At this level of the market, the guest experience is everything. Repeat business is crucial.

"We don't have guests, we have visitors, and we treat our visitors the old-fashioned Greek way," says Elias Kyriakakis, Member of the Board of Directors, Grecotel, "like gods."

Wi-Fi and the services dependent on it, are a vital component of the modern hotel experience. The Group needed a singular, high-performance wireless experience throughout every hotel. With individual hotels having developed local network solutions, Kyriakakis says the goal is now consistency.

ONE OF THE LARGEST NETWORK PROJECTS IN GREECE

The Group is embarking on a major upgrade across all 32 properties, the largest project of its kind in Greece. For the first time there is a group-wide approach across all Grecotel properties. The upgrade is underpinned by Aruba solutions, with over 4,000 indoor and outdoor low- and high-density wireless access points, 500 Aruba 2540, 2920 and 2930 Campus Edge switches and Aruba Virtual Mobility Controller Appliances. One resort alone, the Olympia Riviera, has 600 access points. In total, the deployed Aruba Mobile First Architecture creates one of the largest networks in Greece.

"Some of our properties are vast, up to 2,000,000 sqm. We have 2.5kms of beach at some, others have large wooded areas. With the exception of areas we've purposefully decided to leave 'quiet', we have wireless coverage throughout," explains Kyriakakis.

The installation will be phased. Grecotel plans to upgrade eight hotels a year, with all work being completed by the start of the summer season. There will be no disruption to guest services.

A single network, multiple uses

The Aruba platform brings consistency across the Grecotel mobile connectivity experience. It is easier for Grecotel to manage and monitor usage.

"Nowadays, everyone is always connected," says Kyriakakis. "Connected to their business, to their relatives, their loved ones, their social networks. The connectivity we can now provide throughout our resorts is equal to anything they would experience at home."

In total, the solution supports a huge range of daily operations. There are 1,500 corporate users, 200+ POS, 100 kitchen printers, 300 ordering devices, and 80 tax machines. There is network access for all 6,000 Grecotel staff, and full BYOD capacity for over 18,000 concurrent guest users. Most hotels now have IPTV and VoIP telephony. The network also supports IoT, connecting fridges, heating and cooling, laundry, carts and environmental sensors.

Kyriakakis says total uploaded data from hotel visitors during the six months of the hotels' operation period, is over 290TB and total downloaded data is more than 1.3PB.

REQUIREMENTS

- Deliver the best visitor experiences, from connectivity to personalised services
- Ensure uncompromised network access across 32 hotels and resorts, including beach and wooded areas
- 10GB data backbone
- Full IPTV (ongoing implementation)
- VoIP Telephony
- Housekeeping / maintenance / messaging tablets
- KNX building management system in some hotels
- Simplify access for different user groups, including guests and staff
- Support strategic digital transformation projects of hotel operations

SOLUTIONS

- Aruba 802.11ac Wi-Fi access points
- Aruba Virtual Mobility Controllers
- Aruba Campus Edge switches
- Aruba BLE Beacons Coverage (geolocation, push notifications)
- Aruba Meridian platform

OUTCOMES

- Improves the visitor experience with the launch of the new guest portal, with ordering times reduced by 15%
- Supports new housekeeping system, where issues and scheduling are managed automatically
- Supports new maintenance management system, integrated with the housekeeping system, with maintenance response improved by 20% - saving 15,000 man-hours
- Delivers high-performance networking facilities across sites up to 50,000sqm
- Secures role-based access and consistent experience for staff, visitors and 'things'
- Generates data to enable richer visitor experiences such as automated registration based on preferences
- Establishes platform for future ideas such as 'smart' hotel functionality, asset tracking and wayfinding

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ELIAS KYRIAKAKIS
MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS, GRECOTEL

A network on which guests can self-serve

Rather than a Grecotel app that requires guests to download and then register, the Group has instead created a new online guest portal. The high-performance Aruba network means guests can access the portal from throughout each hotel.

“We tested an application and we promoted it heavily, yet the download rate was just 10% of all visitors. Nobody wants to download application after application. Our guest portal can be used freely before, after, but mainly during a guest’s stay,” says Kyriakakis.

The portal enables guests to book services in restaurants and SPA facilities or order food and beverages, see a daily timetable of events, and connect to a range of local service providers. It has a consistent look and feel with a degree of localisation. Guests are registered automatically when a hotel booking is made or are greeted by the portal when they first access the internet at the resort.

CREATING UNIQUE, PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Grecotel can now identify each guest individually, and automatically connect them the next time they’re in a property. The portal will connect to the Grecotel CRM solution. The Group has around 200,000 members in its loyalty programme. To date, says Yannis Tsichlis, Marketing Director, Grecotel, the portal is being used by 80% of guests at the 5-star properties. Users tend to use the portal 5-6 times over an eight day stay, the average stay length, and remain on the portal for 5-10 minutes at a time.

“We’re better able to build a clearer picture of individuals, and to tailor services and communication accordingly,” says Kyriakakis. “We can spot trends and identify patterns of behaviour. It is creating a real competitive advantage for the business.”



For instance, this insight allows the hotel to ensure the correct fragrance (the company has a choice of 10) is used in a guest’s room, or to prepare a guest’s steak medium-rare, or to have soft pillows, or that a preferred brand of champagne is delivered to a room at a certain time. “These are real touches that make the visitor’s experience better,” says Tsichlis.

Grecotel can also automatically adjust network bandwidth, with four levels, as per guest status or room type. “We can create a superior network experience for VIPs and our club members,” explains Tsichlis.

Driving operational excellence and efficiency

The network, says Kyriakakis, is mission critical: “We can’t do check-in or check-out without the network. We have software controllers so if a controller fails we can swap it automatically.”

From an operational perspective the Aruba platform supports a rethink of the cleaning and maintenance functions. “Because we operate in the luxury market, housekeeping takes place twice a day,” says Kyriakakis. “The entire schedule is now based on an online

system, which also takes into consideration when our visitors wish to have their room cleaned.”

He estimates this has shaved 10% off housekeeping times.

By adapting an off-the-shelf hotel management application, Protel Housekeeping and maintenance, Grecotel has modernised its own housekeeping processes. Cleaning staff are alerted when a room is empty, they can report issues through a mobile smart device and maintenance staff are then alerted automatically (79,000 messages were sent in 2018). Rich media – photos and film – can be shared to help the issue to be fixed and the room re-cleaned. All steps are logged and tracked. There is a different schedule for preparing rooms for new arrivals: 20 minutes for new arrivals, 12 minutes otherwise. Maintenance response times have been reduced by 20%, saving 15,000 man-hours a year. In addition, using staff smartphones, a ‘lost-and-found’ application digitally logged 4,600 items through 2018.

“This solution only works because the entire resort, and every room, is connected,” says Kyriakakis. “We know what we need to do the next day, and we’re better able to manage issues as they arise. The whole process can be done without any voice communication.”

EMPOWERING EVERY EMPLOYEE

Tsichlis says the Aruba solution is indicative of a broader transformation of the hospitality sector.

“Hospitality is based on human contact - travel is about meeting people, and experiencing life, not robots. But digital is part of our everyday life and as an industry we need to maximise the potential of digital to improve the guest experience.”

He says hotels must take care in protecting sensitive guest data and expects hoteliers to create new roles to best translate digital touch-points into real-life experiences. Grecotel sent more than 87,000 automated messages to guests through 2018, all based on personal filters. A Grecotel WhatsApp channel, where guests can order room service, is being trialed in three hotels.

“We want every one of our 32 resorts to feel empowered by digital – how can they make the most out of it? It’s not about enrolling more members onto our loyalty programme but seeing how we can help members get the most out of their membership.

“There are 10,000 hotels in Greece and we are the largest operator in the 5-star sector. I believe there is a bright future for hotels that learn how to maximise the value of technology.”

Smart hotels, happier visitors

Long-term, the Aruba Mobile First Architecture prepares the ground for the development of ‘smart’ hotels. Grecotel plans to build the necessary infrastructure to support location-based services such as indoor GPS.

Other features may include automatic check-in, personalised services based on guest history and preferences, and location-based alerts. From an operational perspective, an omnipresent network supports innovation around heating and cooling sensors, robot cleaners and asset tracking as well as security. The focus, says Kyriakakis, will always be the guest experience.

Kyriakakis concludes: “We are enhancing our CRM, and we want to deliver additional services to our visitors, for example, Alexa services into their rooms, visitors using their phones or tablets to open doors, or using the IPTV in the same way as the guest portal. In part, we are now a technology company. But our technology is employed to make the visitor happier.”